

Dear Members of the Human Services Committee of Connecticut General Assembly:

My name is Linda Harris, and I am a resident of Manchester and member of Uniting for a Safe Inclusive Community – Manchester (USIC).

I am writing in support of HB 6616: AN ACT CONCERNING EXPANSION OF HUSKY HEALTH BENEFITS TO THOSE INELIGIBLE DUE TO IMMIGRATION STATUS.

To expand HUSKY access for immigrants up to age 26 independent of their immigrant status is a significant step in making sure our immigrant community has access to the healthcare we all need and deserve. The health and welfare of all Connecticut residents is dependent on healthy individuals and families functioning within a stable, thriving, and growing workforce utilizing healthcare.

In my volunteer capacity through USIC, working with undocumented individuals and mixed status households, we have tried to locate medical services for women of childbearing age who require gynecological care who cannot afford to seek medical care due to the amount of money required to be paid prior to seeing a physician because they do not have medical insurance. There have been instances of adults going to the emergency room only when their health has deteriorated because they do not want to incur a medical bill which they knew they could not pay. The unfortunate fact is in these situations the individuals qualify for Husky insurance as they meet the income and assets requirements.

Irrespective of an individual's immigration status or age, preventive care is required, and many illnesses and injuries require medical intervention and can be treated by a primary care physician. Having Husky insurance would allow immigrants to access healthcare without concern about the bill. Many immigrant families consciously weigh if they should seek medical care for them and their children due to the additional bill they will incur. Some rely on home remedies or delay medical care until the situation is dire. Many families are fearful of seeking medical intervention due to how they will be perceived and concerned for the personal safety of the family. These concerns are compounded by the knowledge that they will receive a medical bill they cannot afford and prescriptions that they might have to prioritize over food or other essential basic living expenses or cannot purchase due to the cost.

One mother shared her children are on HUSKY due to their legal status; and she was informed she is not eligible for five years due to her status. She stated that she prays she does not get sick because she must work every day to support her family and without insurance she will not seek medical care. This mother is a health caregiver, an essential worker, who is responsible for providing care for high-risk patients. This mother who is documented, like so many undocumented parents and caregivers, continues to work as she did during the pandemic exposing her family to infection knowing if she becomes ill and requires medical care, she will incur a bill she which she cannot pay.

I strongly support HB 6616 and urge you to pass this legislation. I look forward to the committee's work in expanding healthcare access to all immigrants independent of their age or status.

Thank you for your time,

Linda M. Harris